
Opening Extract from...

At the Edge of the Orchard

Written by Tracy Chevalier

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For Claire and Pascale
finding their way in the world

The juice of Apples likewise, as of pippins, and pearemaines, is of very good use in Melancholicke diseases, helping to procure mirth, and to expell heavinesse.

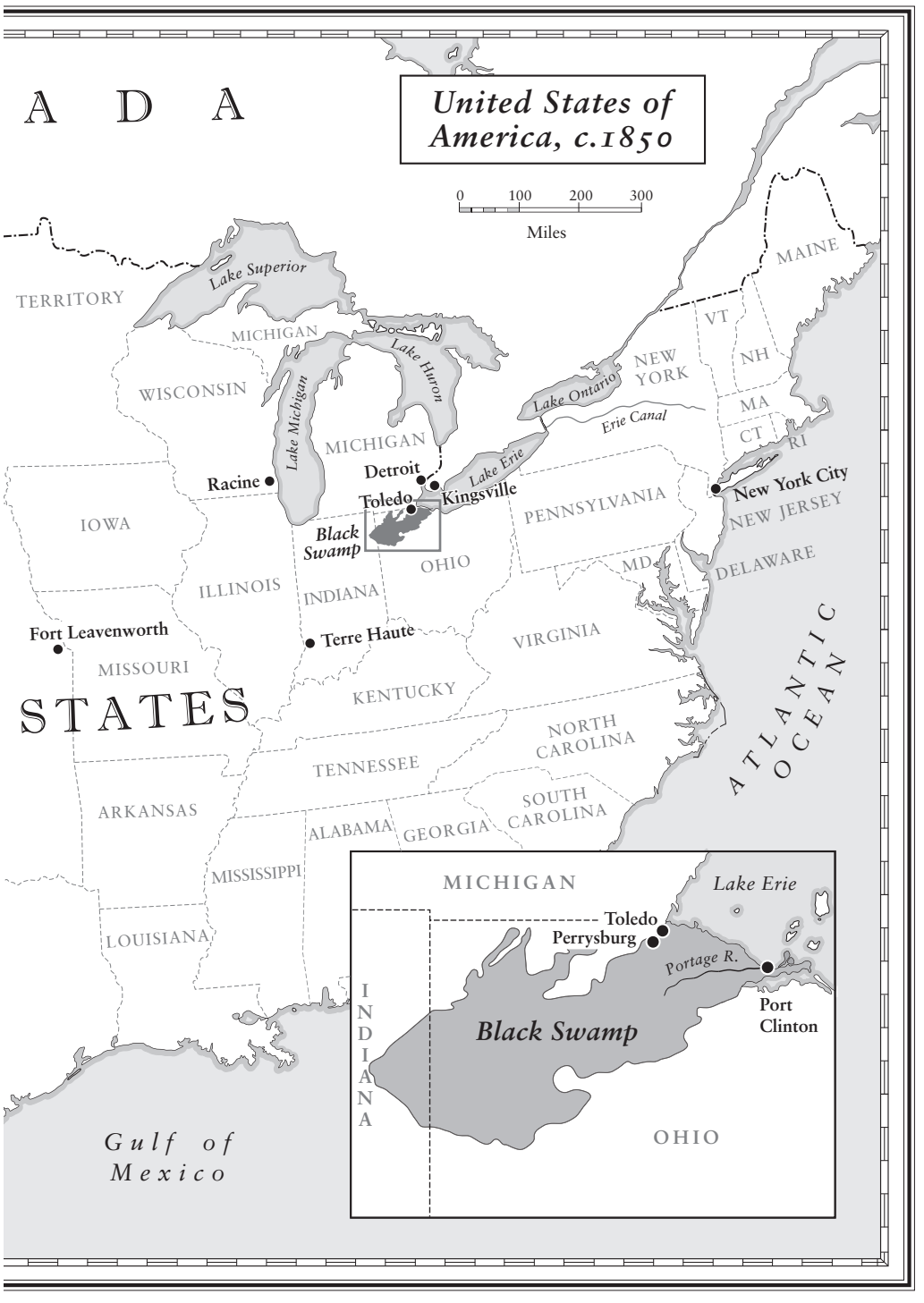
—John Parkinson, *Paradisi in Sole Paradisus Terrestris*, 1629

To the spirit bowed with affliction, or harrowed with cares, a pilgrimage to these shadowy shrines affords most soothing consolation. Behold the evergreen summits of trees that have withstood the storms of more than three thousand years! . . . While lost in wonder and admiration, the turmoil of earthly strife seems to vanish.

—Edward Vischer, *The Mammoth Tree Grove, Calaveras County, California*, 1862

Go West, young man, and grow up with the country.

—John Babsone Lane Soule, 1851
and Horace Greeley, 1865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Gulf of Mexico
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Toledo
Perrysburg
Portage R.
Port Clinton
INDIANA
Black Swamp
OHIO

Black Swamp, Ohio

Spring 1838

They were fighting over apples again. He wanted to grow more eaters, to eat; she wanted spitters, to drink. It was an argument rehearsed so often that by now they both played their parts perfectly, their words flowing smooth and monotonous around each other since they had heard them enough times not to have to listen anymore.

What made the fight between sweet and sour different this time was not that James Goodenough was tired; he was always tired. It wore a man down, carving out a life from the Black Swamp. It was not that Sadie Goodenough was hung over; she was often hung over. The difference was that John Chapman had been with them the night before. Of all the Goodenoughs, only Sadie stayed up and listened to him talk late into the night, occasionally throwing pinecones onto the fire to make it flare. The spark in his eyes and belly and God knows where else had leapt over to her like a flame finding its true path from one curled wood shaving to another. She was always happier, sassier and surer of herself after John Chapman visited.

Tired as he was, James could not sleep while John Chapman's voice drilled through the cabin with the persistence of a swamp mosquito. He might have managed if he had joined his children up in the attic, but he did not want to leave the bed across the room from the hearth like an open invitation. After twenty years together, he no longer lusted after Sadie as he once had,

particularly since applejack had brought out her vicious side. But when John Chapman came to see the Goodenoughs, James found himself noting the heft of her breasts beneath her threadbare blue dress, and the surprise of her waist, thicker but still intact after ten children. He did not know if John Chapman noticed such things as well—for a man in his sixties, he was still lean and vigorous, despite the iron gray in his unkempt hair. James did not want to find out.

John Chapman was an apple man who paddled up and down Ohio rivers in a double canoe full of apple trees, selling them to settlers. He first appeared when the Goodenoughs were new arrivals in the Black Swamp, bringing his boatload of trees and mildly reminding them that they were expected to grow fifty fruit trees on their claim within three years if they wanted to hold on to it legally. In the law's eyes an orchard was a clear sign of a settler's intention to remain. James bought twenty trees on the spot.

He did not want to point a finger at John Chapman for their subsequent misfortunes, but occasionally he was reminded of this initial sale and grimaced. On offer were one-year-old seedlings or three-year-old saplings, which were three times the price of seedlings but would produce fruit two years sooner. If he had been sensible—and he was sensible!—James would simply have bought fifty cheaper seedlings, cleared a nursery space for them and left them to grow while he methodically cleared land for an orchard whenever he had the time. But it would also have meant going five years without the taste of apples. James Goodenough did not think he could bear that loss for so long—not in the misery of the Black Swamp, with its stagnant water, its stench of rot and mold, its thick black mud that even scrubbing couldn't get out of skin and cloth. He needed a taste to sweeten the blow

of ending up here. Planting saplings meant they would have apples two years sooner. And so he bought twenty saplings he could not really afford, and took the time he did not really have to clear a patch of land for them. That put him behind on planting crops, so that their first harvest was poor, and they got into a debt he was still paying off, nine years on.

"They're my trees," Sadie insisted now, laying claim to a row of ten spitters James was planning to graft into eaters. "John Chapman gave 'em to me four years ago. You can ask him when he comes back—he'll remember. Don't you dare touch 'em." She took a knife to a side of ham to cut slices for supper.

"We bought those seedlings from him. He didn't give them to you. Chapman never gives away trees, only seeds—seedlings and saplings are worth too much for him to give away. Anyway, you're wrong—those trees are too big to be from seeds planted four years ago. And they're not yours—they're the farm's." As he spoke James could see his wife blocking out his words, but he couldn't help piling sentence upon sentence to try to get her to listen.

It needled him that Sadie would try to lay claim to trees in the orchard when she couldn't even tell you their history. It was really not that difficult to recall the details of thirty-eight trees. Point at any one of them and James could tell you what year it was planted, from seed or seedling or sapling, or grafted. He could tell you where it came from—a graft from the Goodenough farm back in Connecticut, or a handful of seeds from a Toledo farmer's Roxbury Russet, or another sapling bought from John Chapman when a bear fur brought in a little money. He could tell you the yield of each tree each year, which week in May each blossomed, when the apples would be ready for picking and whether they should be cooked, dried, pressed or eaten just as

they were. He knew which trees had suffered from scab, which from mildew, which from red spider mite and what you did to get rid of each. It was knowledge so basic to James Goodenough that he couldn't imagine it would not be to others, and so he was constantly astonished at his family's ignorance concerning their apples. They seemed to think you scattered some seeds and picked the results, with no steps in between. Except for Robert. The youngest Goodenough child was always the exception.

"They're my trees," Sadie repeated, her face set to sullen. "You can't cut 'em down. Good apples from them trees. Good cider. You cut one down and we'll be losing a barrel of cider. You gonna take cider away from your children?"

"Martha, help your mother." James could not bear to watch Sadie work with the knife, slicing uneven steaks too thick at one end, too thin at the other, her fingers threatening to be included in their supper as well. She was bound to keep cutting steaks until the whole ham was chopped up, or lose interest and stop after only three.

James waited until his daughter—a leaf of a girl with thin hair and pinched gray eyes—continued with the slicing. The Goodenough daughters were used to taking over the making of meals from their mother. "I'm not cutting them down," he explained once more to Sadie. "I'm grafting them so they'll produce sweet apples. You know that. We need more Golden Pippins. We lost nine trees this winter, most of them eaters. Now we got thirty-five spitters and just three eaters. If I graft Golden Pippins onto ten of the spitters, that'll give us thirteen eaters in a few years. We won't have so many trees producing for a while, but in the long run it will suit our needs better."

"*Your* needs. You're the one with the sweet tooth."

James could have reminded Sadie that it was she who put

sugar in her tea, and noticed when they were running low and nagged James to go to Perrysburg for more. Instead he doggedly set out the numbers as he'd done several times over the last week when he'd announced his intention to graft more trees this year. "That'll make thirteen eaters and twenty-five spitters. Add to that fifteen of John Chapman's seedlings he's bringing us next week, and that takes us to fifty-three trees, three more than we need to satisfy the law. Thirteen eaters and forty spitters, all producing in a few years. Eventually we'll have more spitters than we do now for cider. And we can always press eaters if we have to." Secretly he vowed never to waste eaters on making cider.

Slumped at the table, her daughter moving lightly around her as she prepared supper, Sadie watched her husband through her eyebrows. Her eyes were red. "That's your latest apple plan, is it? You gonna go straight past the magic number fifty to fifty-three?"

James knew he should not have used so many numbers to explain what he wanted to do. They bothered Sadie like wasps, especially when she had applejack in her. "Numbers are a Yankee invention, and we ain't in Connecticut now," she often reminded him. "Ohioans don't care a spit about numbers. I don't want to know exactly how many mouths I got to feed—I jest want to put food on the table."

But James could not help himself: it comforted him to count his trees, to mull over the number, add another Golden Pippin, remove a mongrel spitter that was a result of one of John Chapman's visits. Solid numbers held back the woods surrounding their claim, so dense you could never count all the trees. Numbers made you feel in charge.

Today Sadie's response to the numbers he laid out in his

argument was even blunter. “Fuck your numbers,” she said. “You ain’t never gonna reach fifty, much less fifty-three.”

Disrespect for numbers: that was what made James slap her—though he wouldn’t have if she’d still held the knife.

She responded by going for him with her fists, and got in a jab to the side of his head before he wrestled her back into her seat and slapped her again. At least she didn’t manage to catch an eye, as she had done once; his neighbors enjoyed teasing James about the shiner his wife had given him. Buckeye, they called it, after the chestnuts so common in Ohio. Lots of wives sported buckeyes; not so many husbands.

The second slap split Sadie’s lip. She seemed puzzled by the sight of her own blood, and remained seated, the bright drops spotting her dress like fallen berries.

“Get your mother cleaned up, and call me when supper’s ready,” James said to Martha, who set down the knife and went to get a cloth. Martha was his favorite, being gentle and never challenging him or seeming to laugh at him as some of his other children did. He feared for her each August when the swamp fever arrived. Almost every year one of his children was picked off, to join the row of graves marked with wooden crosses in a slightly higher spot in the woods not far from the cabin. With each grave he’d had to clear maples and ash to make space to dig. He’d learned to do this in July, before anyone died, so that the body did not have to wait for him to wrestle with the trees’ extensive roots. Best to get the wrestling out of the way when he had the time.

I was used to his slaps. Didnt bother me none. Fightin over apples was jest what we did.

Funny, I didnt think much about apples fore we came to the Black Swamp. When I was growin up we had an orchard like everybody else but I didnt pay it no attention cept when the blossom was out in May. Then Id go and lie there smellin some sweet perfume and listenin to the bees hum so happy cause they had flowers to play with. That was where James and I lay our first time together. I shouldve known then he wasnt for me. He was so busy inspectin my familys trees and askin how old each was—like I would know—and what the fruit was like (Juicy like me, I said) that finally I had to unbutton my dress myself. That shut him up a while.

I never was a good picker. Ma said I was too quick, let too many drop and pulled off the stems of the rest. I was quick cause I wanted to get it done. I used two hands to twist and pull two apples and then the third would drop and bruise and wed have to gather all the bruised ones separate and cook em up right away into apple butter. Beginnin of each season Ma and Pa would get me pickin till they remembered about that third apple always droppin. So they put me on to gatherin the windfalls that were bruised and damaged from fallin off the tree. Windfalls werent all bad apples. They could still be stewed or made into cider. Or theyd have me cookin or slicin rings to dry. I liked the slicin. If you cut an apple across the core rather than along it you get the seeds makin flowers or stars in the middle of the circle. I told John Chapman once and he smiled at me. Gods ways, he said. Youre smart to see that, Sadie. Only time anyone ever called me smart.

James wouldnt let me touch the apples on his trees either. His precious thirty-eight trees. (Oh I knew how many he had. He thought I wasnt listenin when he was rattlin through his numbers but drunk or not I heard him cause he repeated himself so much.)

When we was married back in Connecticut he learned real quick how many apples I spoiled. So in the Black Swamp he got some of the children to pick em—Martha and Robert and Sal. He wouldnt let Caleb or Nathan pick, said we were all too rough. He was like a little old woman with his trees. Drove me crazy.

James headed out behind the cabin, past the garden they'd begun turning over now the ground was no longer frozen, and out to the orchard. Upon settling in the Black Swamp, the first thing the Goodenoughs had done after building a rough cabin close to the Portage River was to clear land for the orchard so as to plant John Chapman's apple saplings. Every oak, every hickory, every elm he cut down was an agony of effort. It was hard enough to chop up and haul the trunk and branches to set aside for firewood, or for making bed frames or chairs or wheels or coffins. But extracting the stumps and roots almost killed him each time he hacked and dug and pulled and ground. Prying out a stump reminded him of how deeply a tree clung to the ground, how tenacious a hold it had on a place. Though he was not a sentimental man—he did not cry when his children died, he simply dug the graves and buried them—James was silent each time he killed a tree, thinking of its time spent in that spot. He never did this with the animals he hunted—they were food, and transient, passing through this world and out again, as people did. But trees felt permanent—until you had to cut them down.

He stood in the melting March dusk and surveyed his orchard—five rows of trees, with a small nursery of seedlings in one corner. It was rare to see space around individual trees in the Black Swamp; normally there was either open water or dense woods. The Goodenough orchard was not spectacular, but it was

proof to James that he could tame one small patch of land, make the trees do what he wanted. Beyond them, wilderness waited in the tangled undergrowth and sudden bogs; you had to take each step with care or find yourself up to your thighs in black stagnant water. After going into the swamp, to hunt or cut wood or visit a neighbor, James was always relieved to step back into the safe order of his orchard.

Now he counted his apple trees, even though he already knew that he had thirty-eight. He had expected the requirement for settling in Ohio of fifty viable fruit trees in three years would be easy to achieve, but he had been assuming apple trees would grow in the swamp as they had done on his father's farm in Connecticut, where the ground was fertile and well drained. But swampland was different: waterlogged and brackish, it rotted roots, encouraged mildew, attracted blackfly. It was surprising that apple trees could survive there at all. There were plenty of other trees: maple was abundant, also ash and elm and hickory and several kinds of oak. But apple trees needed light and dry soil or they could easily not produce fruit. And if they did not produce, the Goodenoughs must go without. The Black Swamp was not like Connecticut, where if your trees had blight or scab or mildew and grew no apples, you could barter or buy from neighbors. Their neighbors here were few and scattered—only the Days two miles away had been there almost as long, though lately others had begun to settle nearby—and had no apples to spare.

James Goodenough was a sensible man, but apples were his weakness. They had been since he was a child and his mother had given him sweet apples as a special treat. Sweetness was a rare taste, for sugar cost dear; but an apple's tart sweetness was almost free since, once planted, apple trees took little work. He

recalled with a shudder their first years in the Black Swamp without apples. He hadn't realized till he had to go without for over three years how large a part apples had played in his life, how he craved them more than whiskey or tobacco or coffee or sex. That first autumn when, after a lifetime of taking them for granted, James finally understood that there would be no apples to pick and store and eat, he went into a kind of mourning that surprised him. His desperation even drove him to pick the tiny fruit from a wild apple tree he came across along one of the Indian trails; it must have grown from a settler's discarded apple core. He could only manage three before the sourness forced him to stop, and his stomach ached afterwards. Later, over near Perrysburg, he shamed himself by stealing from a stranger's orchard, though he took only one apple, and it turned out to be a spitter rather than an eater. He ate it anyway.

In subsequent years he bought more trees from John Chapman—seedlings this time—and grew his own from seeds as well. Trees grown from seeds usually produced sour apples but, as James liked to point out to whoever would listen, one in ten tended to turn out sweet. Like growing anything in the Black Swamp, it took time for the apple trees to thrive, and even those that seemed healthy could easily die over the winter. While the Goodenoughs did have apples within three years of their arrival, they could not be relied on. Sometimes the crop was heavy; other times the apples were scarce and tiny. Sometimes disease killed the trees. For several years James struggled to get thirty trees to grow, much less fifty. More recently he'd had more success, and the previous fall had picked apples from forty-seven trees. Over the winter, however, it appeared nine had died, like a punishment for his hubris.

Luckily no one ever came around to count how many trees

they had, as it was too hard to get in and out of the Black Swamp for law officials to bother. None of his few neighbors seemed concerned about the fifty-trees rule. Sadie was amused by the number, and enjoyed taunting her husband with it. Sometimes she would whisper "fifty" to him as she passed. But James fretted over it, always expecting someone to show up on the river or along one of the Indian trails that crisscrossed the Black Swamp and inform him that his farm was no longer his.

I never wanted to live in the Black Swamp. Who would? It aint a name that draws you in. You get stuck there, more like—stuck in the mud and cant go no farther, so you stay cause theres land and no people, which was what we were lookin for. James was second youngest of six healthy sons, so there werent but a little bit of Goodenough farm in Connecticut for us. We managed for a time but James kept reachin for me at night and the children kept comin. Then his father, an old killjoy who never liked me, started hintin about us moving west where we could settle more land. He got the wives of James brothers to talk to their husbands, which they were glad to do cause they didnt like me either. They didnt trust me round their men. I got something they didnt have. So the brothers started pushin James to be more adventurous than he was. Really they shouldve gotten James brother Charlie to go west. Charlie Goodenough was the youngest and by tradition he was the one shouldve gone. Plus he had the gumption in him. Charlie wouldnt of let mud trap him in the swamp. Hed have bust through it and got out into the open where theres good healthy land solid under your feet, with sun and grass and clean water. But everybody loved Charlie, his wife most of all. It was she took against me the worst. Maybe she had reason to.

Damned if she werent the nicest of the wives too.

Then all of a sudden Charlie also said James ought to go—though he looked real sorry when we did leave. Stood longer than the rest, watchin our wagon go down the long track away from the Goodenough farm. I bet he wished it was him beside me headin towards a new life.

Turns out lots of Connecticut farmers had gone to Ohio before us. Too many. We went across New York then took a boat on the lake from Buffalo to Cleveland and started lookin, expectin our pick of land to be laid out before us like a nicely made bed, but all we found were other Yankees—most of them war veterans got their allotment from the government. We made a circle round Cleveland, then heard we was better off goin west to the Maumee River, and even into Indiana. After Lower Sandusky we was headed towards Perrysburg when the road—if you can call it that—got worse and worse. That road was where we met our first enemy. Mud. I never saw anything stick so much. It stuck to the wagon wheels and when they turned they collected more mud like a ball of snow gettin bigger and bigger. Got so we had to stop the wagon every fifty feet to scrape it off. Near broke the horses legs. Finally they wouldnt budge and we had to wait till they recovered. Next day we got half a mile before they stopped again. Along that stretch of road there were inns every quarter mile for all the travelers gettin stuck. The inns themselves were set up by settlers who couldnt get no further.

At last we got to the Portage River and decided that was it, we couldnt go no farther so it looked like wed arrived at our Promised Land. By then everything was covered in mud. Wed been wadin through it and couldnt get it off our boots or off our dresses or out from under our toenails. Sometimes the boys

would take off their trousers at night and in the morning theyd be standin up by themselves with the mud dried on em. Had to live with it, and wash in the river. John Chapman was a smart one with his canoe glidin up and down the rivers and creeks easy as you like, stayin out of the mud.

After a time we got used to it. Maybe I jest stopped carin. Id hear new settlers complain bout the mud and think, Theres worse things than mud. Jest you wait.

We arrived in the swamp in early April which is a good time to settle cept theres a rush to plant crops and a garden and build a house. And to do any of those things you first got to clear the trees. They was another enemy waitin for us in the Black Swamp. Oh, there were a lot of enemies there.

Damn them trees. I hate em, God love me I do. Back east we didnt have the tree problem the way we did in Ohio. James and I both grew up on farms that had been made some time before, with houses and barns built and cleared fields and gardens. My mother even had flower beds. Thered been settlers in Connecticut for two hundred years, and theyd been the ones breakin their backs to dig up the trees. Every garden, every field, every churchyard and road had to be made by takin out the trees. Wasnt till we was faced with a slice of land full of Ohio trees that we realized how much work we had to do. Well, James had to do, and the older children. I was carryin Robert in my belly and was too big to use an axe or haul wood or pull at those goddamn stumps. There sure wasnt gonna be any flower beds in the Black Swamp. Any clearin had to be done for a better reason than flowers. It was for feedin you and keepin you warm and dry.

Clearin took so much out of my children that sometimes I think thats what killed Jimmy and Patty, weakened em so the swamp fever got em that much easier. Patty died the first summer,

Jimmy the next. I never forgave the trees for that, and never will. If I could Id gladly burn down these woods.

Even when we thought wed cleared all the trees we needed to, they kept growin and growin, pressin in on us. We had to keep an eye out for the seedlings that sprung up everywhere. It reminded me of dirty pots or dirty clothes: you scrub and scrub and get em clean, then an hour later youve burnt oatmeal on the bottom of the pot or smeared mud on your apron, and you realize it never ends, theres always gonna be pots and laundry to do. Trees are the same, you clear a field and they start springin up again. At least theyre slower than laundry. But you think youre payin attention, then a year goes by and you find you overlooked a seedling and suddenly its a tree, with roots that dont want to come out.

I heard theres land out west thats got no trees on it at all. Prairie. Lord send me there. I tried to talk to James bout goin there, but he wouldnt listen, said weve made a place for ourselves, hunkered down like toads in the stinkin rottin swamp, and here well stay.

A branch snapped behind him in the orchard. My shadow, James thought. He did not turn around but reached out to run his finger along the branch of the nearest tree—a spitter—and feel the satisfying bump of a nascent bud. "Robert, get me a Golden Pippin from the cold cellar."

A few minutes later his youngest child returned and handed him a yellow apple speckled with brown dots—the only yellow apple in the Black Swamp that James knew of. It had an unusual oblong shape, as if someone had stretched it, and it was small enough to be held comfortably in his hand. He squeezed it,

relishing the anticipation of its taste. It might be wrinkled and soft and well past its prime, but Golden Pippins retained their taste for months, if not their crunch.

James bit into it, and though he did not smile—smiles were rare in the Black Swamp—he shut his eyes for a moment better to appreciate the taste. Golden Pippins combined the flavors of nuts and honey, with a sharp finish he'd been told was like pineapple. It reminded him of his mother and sister laughing at the kitchen table in Connecticut as they sliced apples into rings to be dried. The three trees on the edge of the Black Swamp orchard that produced these sweet apples were all grafts from the Golden Pippin tree James had grown up with. He had grafted them when the Goodenoughs first arrived in the Black Swamp nine years before, from branches James insisted on bringing with them to Ohio. Though grafted at the same time, they had grown up to be different sizes; it always surprised James that the trees could turn out as varied as his children.

Robert was watching him with brown eyes the color of pine resin, still and intent like one of the smarter breeds of dog—English sheep or German shepherd. He rarely needed looking after, and he seemed to understand trees in a way none of the other Goodenoughs did. By rights he should be James' favorite: a son, slight but healthy, clever and alert, the Goodenough child most likely to survive swamp life. He had been born just after they moved to the Black Swamp, and maybe because he was a native to the swamp, the mosquitoes left him alone, looking for foreign blood. Even when he was very young, it was Robert who nursed the Goodenoughs through swamp fever, sometimes the only family member unaffected. He followed his father around, watching and learning from him as his older brothers Caleb and Nathan never bothered to. Yet James found his son's

attention disconcerting. At almost nine Robert was too young to judge others, but he often caused James to look at himself, and there he always found fault. However much he taught Robert—how to skin squirrels, how to build a wormwood fence, how to plug gaps between the logs of the cabin to make it warmer, how to store apples so they did not bruise—his son continued to stare at him expectantly. That was why he preferred fragile, floating Martha, who did not seem to want more than James could give.

Now Robert's direct gaze made James feel nailed like a hide to a wall, and he fumbled with the half-eaten Golden Pippin and dropped it. It rolled into dead leaves, catching them in its exposed flesh. Before James could move, Robert had picked it up, brushed it off and held it out to his father.

"You finish it," James said.

"There's not many left, Pa."

"That's all right. You eat it." James watched with satisfaction as his son finished the apple in two bites, his face revealing his shy pleasure in the taste.

"Where do those Golden Pippins come from?" he quizzed his son.

"Connecticut."

"And before that?"

"England. Your grandparents brought over branches of their favorite apple tree."

"Where in England?"

Robert stared at his father with his unsettling eyes and shook his head. He was not the kind of boy to bluff if he didn't know. James was glad of his honesty. "Herefordshire. Now, tomorrow we'll graft. Go and check the grafting clay, make sure it hasn't dried out. If it needs it, add a little water and stir it in."

Robert nodded.

"You know what you're looking for? You don't need me to check it with you?"

"I'm all right, Pa." Robert trudged off towards the river, picking up a wooden bucket as he went.

Most springs James Goodenough grafted a few apple trees, turning spitters into eaters, or poor spitters into better spitters. In Connecticut he had learned from his father how to make a productive tree from an indifferent one, and though he had now performed successful grafts dozens of times, he still appreciated the surprise of this re-creation. Their fourth autumn in the Black Swamp, they picked their first crop of Golden Pippins, small and with a thicker skin than those in Connecticut, but edible. James could still recall the first bite he took of one, savoring the crunch and the honey taste with the pineapple finish. The fact that Golden Pippins could grow in the swamp—that a sliver of his ordered life in Connecticut was now tucked into Ohio mud—made him hopeful that one day he might finally feel at home there.

Grafting had always seemed a miracle to James, that you could take the best part of one tree—its roots, say—bind to it the best part of another tree—one producing sweet apples—and create a third tree, strong and productive. It was a little like making a baby, he supposed, except that you had control over what characteristics you chose. If he could graft his children, what parts of himself and Sadie would he choose to put together? Perhaps his steadiness with her spirit—which, though mercurial, was infectious. In the right mood she could make a room full of people dance.

But he could not choose the parts: they came potluck. The Goodenough children were not a combination of the best of

their parents, but a sometimes painful mixture of the things that bothered James about himself and what he hated in Sadie, with an added pinch of their own particular characters. Caleb was dour and violent, Sal tetchy, Martha uncertain, Nathan sarcastic. Robert was a mystery—a changeling, James sometimes thought, a child he would not have thought could be Sadie's if he'd not seen him slip out of her womb in a wave of water and blood, landing ashore without even a cry.

Sadie viewed grafting with suspicion, an attitude she had picked up from John Chapman. "You ain't God," she liked to say. "Choppin' and changin' and makin' monsters. It ain't right." He noticed, though, that she still ate the apples from the grafted trees. Once when he pointed this out she threw the apple she was eating at him and gave him a bloody nose. Afterwards he retrieved the apple and finished it himself. He did not like to see fruit wasted.

The first time John Chapman came through we hadnt been in the Black Swamp but a few weeks and were livin half in the wagon half under canvas thrown over a frame James had knocked together. The girls and I were down at the river on the edge of our claim washin clothes when we heard a whistle sounded like that bird they call a bob white. Then along comes this grizzled man, paddlin in a canoe and hallooin us like we was old friends. He had long greasy hair and a beard stained yellow round his mouth from chewin baccy, and he wore a coffee sack belted round the middle with a piece of rope, and holes cut out for the neck and arms. He looked like a crazed swamp man, but we was glad to see him, as there werent a whole lotta folks around and it was a treat to get a visitor, even a crazy one.